

Dynamic Signs

DYNAMIC SIGNS indicate the volume, or how *soft* or *loud* the music should be played. Most musical terms are written in Italian since Italian composers were among the first to write such instructions in their manuscripts.

The word *piano* in Italian means soft; the word *forte* means loud.
The most commonly used dynamic signs are:

| ITALIAN | SIGN | ENGLISH |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| <i>piano</i> | <i>p</i> | soft |
| <i>forte</i> | <i>f</i> | loud |
| <i>mezzo piano</i> | <i>mp</i> | moderately soft |
| <i>mezzo forte</i> | <i>mf</i> | moderately loud |
| <i>pianissimo</i> | <i>pp</i> | very soft |
| <i>fortissimo</i> | <i>ff</i> | very loud |

Mezzo means moderately; *issimo* means very.

Dynamic signs arranged in order from very soft to very loud, are: *pp, p, mp, mf, f, ff*

A Gradual Change in Dynamics

Terms used to indicate a gradual change in volume, from *soft* to *loud* or *loud* to *soft* are:

| ITALIAN | SIGN | ENGLISH |
|--|------|------------------|
| <i>crescendo</i> or <i>cresc.</i> | | gradually louder |
| <i>diminuendo</i> or <i>dim.</i> or <i>decrescendo</i> or <i>decresc.</i> | | gradually softer |

Exercises

1 Write the Italian word for the following dynamic signs:

| | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| <i>f</i> _____ | <i>pp</i> _____ |
| <i>mp</i> _____ | <i>ff</i> _____ |
| _____ | <i>mf</i> _____ |
| <i>p</i> _____ | _____ |

2 Clap the following line, observing the dynamic signs indicated.

3 Use every dynamic sign learned above at least once to mark the appropriate dynamic signs on the lines beneath the following story.

"Wake up!" whispered Ron to his brother Steven. The boys walked softly out the door. They heard the moderately soft sound of a distant airplane, which became gradually louder and roared very loudly as it flew over head, then faded away gradually. Steven said, "Let's play basketball," in a moderately loud voice. They shouted a loud "Yes!" as they ran to the park.

a. _____ b. _____
 c. _____ d. _____ e. _____
 f. _____
 g. _____ h. _____

Articulations

The manner in which a note is performed is called **Articulation**. Articulation markings can indicate the style, attack, or length of a given note or notes.

Interpretation



Staccato — perform the note short and detached
(symbol appears on the note head side)



Tenuto — hold or stretch the note to its full value or a little longer
(symbol appears on the note head side)



Accent — perform the note with emphasis
(symbol appears on the note head side and outside the staff)



Sforzando — perform the note suddenly with strong accent
(symbol is always below the staff and note)



Fermata — sustain pitch much longer than its normal rhythmic value
(symbol is always above the staff and note)

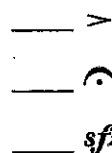
STUDENT ASSIGNMENT

1. Mark the music as indicated in each instruction below. Make sure the articulations are placed appropriately.



- Place *staccato* markings on every pitch in measure 1.
- In measure 2, mark the Fs *tenuto* and the Cs accented.
- In measure 3, mark beats 1 and 3 *staccato*. Mark 2 and 4 *tenuto*.
- Mark beat 1 of measure 4 *sforzando*. Mark beats 2, 3, and 4 *staccato*.
- In measure 5, place a *tenuto* marking on the quarter notes and a *fermata* on the half note.

2. Fill in the letter of the term that best matches each symbol.



a) *sforzando*

b) *tenuto*

c) *accent*

d) *staccato*

e) *fermata*

3. Circle which of the following, by definition, are articulations.

forte

half step

accent

slur

pianissimo